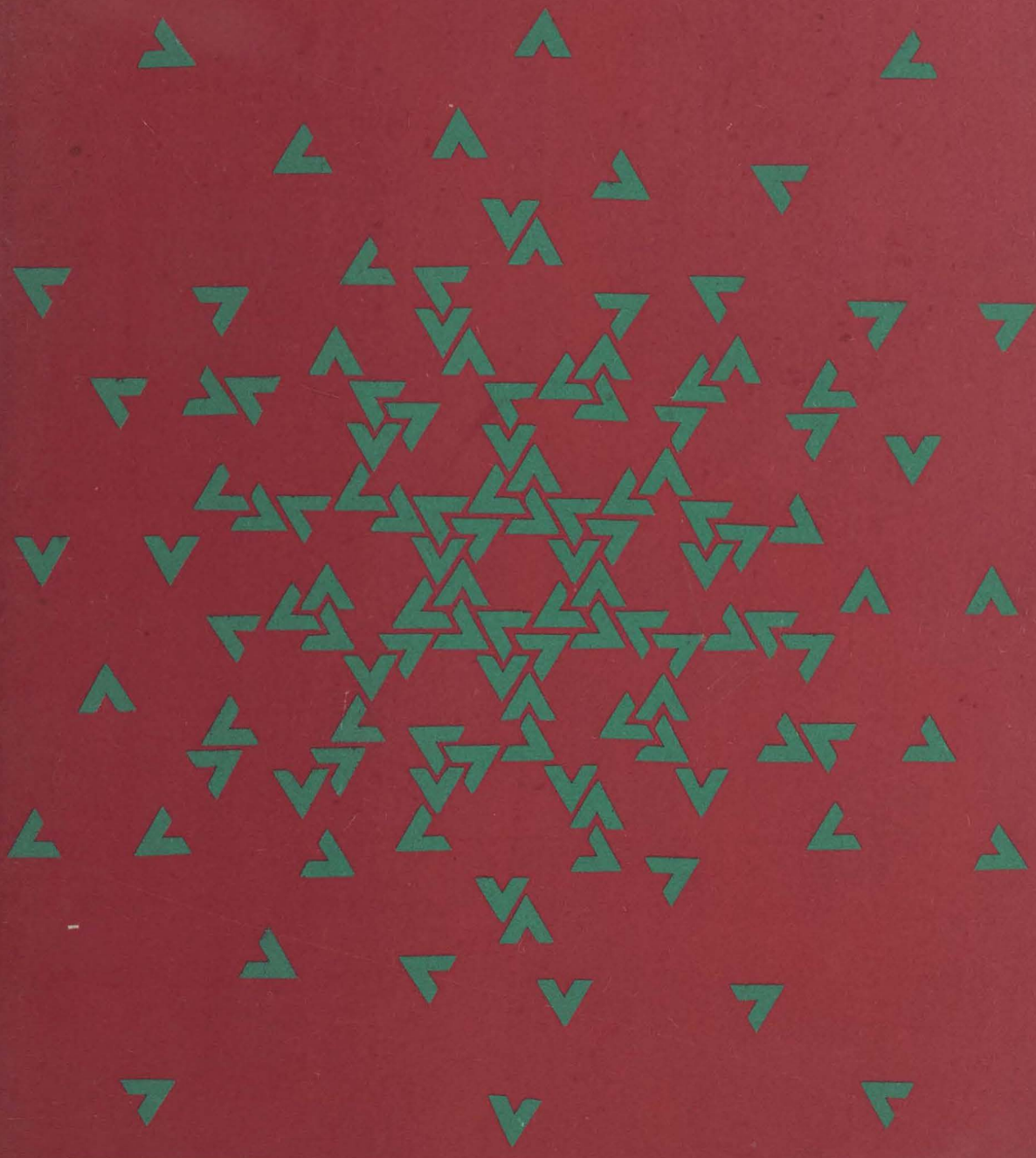
DIVAN

Peter Lamborn Wilson



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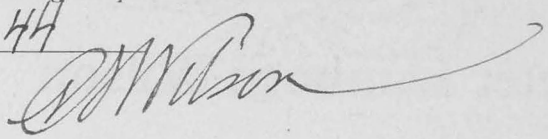

Cover art by Karl Schlamminger

Some of these poems have appeared in Conoscenza Religiosa, Sophia Perennis, Lapis Lazuli *and* S.H.Y.

To My Teachers

And in the evening he entered a valley, and at the head of the valley he came to a hermit's cell, and the hermit welcomed him gladly, and there he spent the night. And in the morning he arose, and when he went forth, a shower of snow had fallen the night before, and a hawk had killed a wild fowl in front of the cell. And the noise of the horse scared the hawk away, and a raven alighted upon the bird. And Peredur stood, and compared the blackness of the raven, and whiteness of the snow, and redness of the blood, to the hair of the lady he loved, which was blacker than jet, and to her skin which was whiter than snow, and to the two red spots upon her cheeks, which were redder than the blood upon the snow appeared to be.

– *Peredur ap Efrawg*

When Shamsuddin Tabrizi met Shaykh Awhaduddin Kermani, he asked him:
'What are you doing?'
Awhaduddin replied:
'Looking at the moon in a bowl of water.'

– Jami,
Nafahat al-Uns

SONG

Each time in separation
roiled in the dark smoke
of your hair I want to lament
my absence my breaking your laws

instead I seem to be drunk
I see the face of the wineseller
I know he will extend me credit
I hear musicians in the other room

the tavern garden overgrown
with flowering vines with fruit trees
sings for me. The saki
half fills my cup

and with half a glance
half a smile leaves me again.
I know I should repent – but Selim
spring never seems to end.

INCENSE ON FOUR THEMES

I
Camphor and benzoin, for purity
bay, eucalyptus, laurel,
  cypress needles dried & pounded, for distance
vetiver, for coldness
patchouli, for renunciation

Back up the cold mountain
at the end of a lost road
a sagging cabin, the winter sun:
in a white robe he sits on the porch
looking blankly at patches of snow.

II
Amber, for light
sandal, for strength & discrimination
turkish tobacco, for dryness
aloes, for nobility
civet or ambergris, for swiftness
clove, for psychic power

On the wide verandah
he kneels, his back straight,
a scimitar before him
as if poised for battle –
nevertheless he is alone.
Far away over the desert
a storm hurls spears of lightning –
he laughs.

III
Musk, for subtle penetration
myrrh, for shadow
lotus or jasmine, for the moon
lavender, for virginity

Worn stone steps lead down
to the tank, where the full moon
signals from between water-lilies.
She is silent, dressed in a blue robe
set with stars.

IV
Rose attar, for devotion
frankincense, for mystery
cinnamon, for fervour & heat
church incense, for faith

Before the cool white shrine
to the beat of huge tambourines
two lines of men face each other
swaying, repeating a single phrase
till one of them breaks rank
arms outstretched, long hair flying
spins round and round
like a mad star.

SEVEN STANZAS FOR E. Z.

The desert aches
or the traveller's thoughts thin out
losing themselves in mottled wastes
gone in the far hills
to find the marching dusk
and its first spy the one
and motionless hawk

The desert haunches against
the edges of town.
Under the evening's surface
flows an exiled music
in the deep and crystal pitch
of rivers underground and galleries
and secret veins

Pines like green negroes
guard the soft domes
of the caravanserai
camels squat like pyramids
in the court in the moon
not moving not sleeping
only this one night upon the earth

The great bazaar is closed
there is nothing to buy
walk slow and save the forgotten odours
such nights are the end of the world
you are the thief who does not steal
your sleeplessness is power
and the merchants' dreams are dust

At the end of a corridor
you come to a gate sewn shut with vines
– page of manuscript with talismans
from a treatise on the meaning of pearls –
closed with petals of rust.
Suppose the gate were hers
the lost-found nation of her house
night-jars whippoorwills nightingales
share the watch and whisper the hours
to her curtained window

A drop of ink spreading in a bowl of milk
her curls spread tangled on the pillow
her breath amber buried in sea-beds
musk just growing in the glands of newborn deer.
Night drinks the moon; in her open window
flowers drink the night; beneath her sheets
limbs drink the flowers, subtle water
of veridical dreams.
This room is her oratory
her orison a moment caught between her eyelids
and the dawn which tilts horizons
towards an orient of scented dusk

At the city's far edge
cemetery planes and cypresses
catch fragments of night
like votive rags in black branches.
Behind you the city wakes
dawn's grey marble paints the graves
the emblems of your journey
with gestures of
silence

PETRARCH *SONNET* CLXXXV

Phoenix
from her goldplumed
treasury
makes of Nature a necklace
to tincture
her throat's snow
melting all hearts
but burning mine –
And
those gem-coals
lend their glow
to airy Space. Love
pumps the bellows
silently invoking
subtle flame
to burn me
even in winter's
solstice-cold
the hoarfrost of her shoulders
veiled in a purple scarf
sewn with roses
on a blue ground.
Empty legend
has her fabulous nest
in perfumed Arabia
the secret truth:
she flies here
in our own
paradise.

QUATRAIN

Deep in vision hides the face, the concubine
The virginal who carves & plays an amber lute
And teaches me how to sublime
All music to its root.

KHEZR

Old cook in his apron hikes through an overcast land between jasper pines, and ferns brush his legs like wings at night; comes to a spring or pond about six feet wide – about the length of a dead man's pine box! How deep the water's smoke quartz! He strips to take a bath not caring alone here for his beard and old skin like lichen. Dipping his feet he sees two huge carp glimmer toward the air, flexible as lacquered muscles – chasing each other's tails. Up to his waist: they invite him to their ancient sport. Over his head: cold cold and ageless as a fish the cook swims up again to break the surface, snort up like an old forked whale.

ON *METAMORPHOSES* BOOK ONE

You can remember yesterday? and memory, that faculty closest to the divine, has purposes which stretch beyond death and birth, outside even the piercing colours of an opened present. Only a few hundred generations have passed since the beginning. You remember your grandparents, you still possess their blood. Only the resonances of words separate memory from imagination. You recall their parents and parents' parents . . . already in the earliest photographs, the quality of light was somehow different – even antique cameras cannot now reproduce it – suggesting a different quality of Time. But this is no obstacle to memory if all of Eternity's tricks are woven in the dance of a living brain . . .

. . . a different quality of light which is now to be recaptured only in that obscurest room of all, that most occult chamber – and yet how easily. Is there no thread which leads back from painting, back to the daubs in caves (made when light was so intense the inner organs of stags could be seen with a casual glance) from novel to poem to epic to hymn, sung when the mountain peaks still touched the sky . . . and before that, before the leaf-thin flints, before the shamans founded their separate guild – a silence? A silence now to be heard only in a seven-locked room – and yet how easily. This memory-play might well distract us from the business of living in the snow, the lightning, the lotus, the rose, the fire of the present. So this is didactic prose, with none of the sacred hesitations, the borderland caresses of a lyric. These words describe something which is easy to know . . . how could you make a mistake?

I remember so clearly, so easily, I am almost tempted to half believe in the ludicrous doctrine of reincarnation – as if it were necessary for 'I' to have been there, that 'I' might hold in my grasp these images, this palette of light. I should believe I went on the Cattle-Raid of Cooley, the hunt of the Boar, and sat with the head of Bran facing London for seven years that passed like a night's banquet. I remember when the Mediterranean turned its back on Italy and Greece and faced Damascus and Baghdad, I was a friend or disciple of Awhaduddin and 'Iraqi and Sadruddin, and even once met the Shaykh himself who had come from Spain. In the 19th century I sat on a verandah somewhere in Northern India while the last gold of evening splayed through the green of a rajput miniature and listened to the void-like tones of a surbahar and thought of Persia and mourned the uselessness of the Princes and copied a few verses in flawless nastaliq. But ask me about Alexandria in the time of the Gnostics – don't I know something about Manichaeism from the inside? Or go back in Egypt as far as you like – I can describe for you the increasing sobriety of the light back to a time when every single molecule knew its place in the balance. But think for yourself – didn't you have at least one life with the Aryans before they left Hyperborea? and a life in Mesopotamia locked to the patterns of the stars?

Iron, bronze, silver, gold – among all the correspondences of these terms surely one has to do with the quality of light, the way the sun's rays mixed with waves of Time and washed upon men's eyes. How could you have believed in clumsy and ineleg-

ant doctrines, even worse than my metaphor of repeated birth? I will not weigh down my words with even one example of the thickening or coagulation of Time, or quote even one saint who cursed the present and blessed the past. I suggest that you can awaken your own memory and discover these textures for yourself:

They did not wound the body of Earth their mother, and so she gave them freely what they needed, and they collected it in an hour or two a day. They had no word for religion because every rock, leaf, drop of water, animal, every speck of dust spoke to them and told them a name. There was no journey: they were born at the goal. They went naked because every atom of their skin extended into a bath of light. They had no tools because every piece of wood was as luminous as their hands. No ritual – every gesture unlocked the dance of light. Take this image back, back beyond even death and the ancestors, beyond the trees and the eloquent flight of birds, and the purpose of these words is exhausted; they have brought you full circle to the locked room, to the one task you must accomplish that you will never regret . . . beyond Ages . . . into the light.

TWO POEMS BY LU YU

1. In imitation of his 'Drunken Song by a Pool'

Now I wish to build a tower
so high that when I climb it
storey by storey my body
will lose its flesh
and from the aether look down
on dust and storm clouds;
or build a ship for chemists
to sail ten thousand turbulent miles
to the magic islands of the west
where two mulberry trees
intertwined lean on each other
to the sky; I'll hang the sun
on their branches, stopping
the passage of Spring
the rolling of constellations.
I am a dragon on my three-foot flute
thunder on the drum at my waist
a whale for drinking wine
but steady, foot-sure
sober as a hill of jade.
Half drunk I tip my hat
to the mirror of the pool
and study the youth
which lingers in my hair:
nothing will change
it will remain black.
This girl is luminescent
as the moon, as flowers;
moss collects on the bones
of the dead; future time
will think on this moment
as I think on the past.

Will you grudge me this elation?
With such wine, how shall I conceal it?

2. In imitation of his 'Rain in Late Spring'

The year does not wait for me
apricots begin again in the east garden
these ancient texts hold no remedy
for age for hopelessness.
Imperceptibly gusts of rain
banish Spring as I lie
drowsing in my closet
the clay jug overturned
wine dribbling down my sleeve
leaving tracks on silk
as it runs to earth.
On dangerous journeys one fears
to look back at strong waves.
The cloud-wrapped mountains
must contain my body
protect it from attack.

IMITATION OF A POEM BY LU CH'IH TING

I wonder how much longer
will I be able to stay here?
the Bureau of Rites the Bureau of Songs
these have their place
the rectification of Names

but in Spring or Autumn
one imagines a pond
at the end of a gravel road
with a tower built of logs
somewhere in the mountain

three storeys with ladders
of crude pine between them
the first would be a workshop
& kitchen with a black iron stove
wood benches, jars of herbs

the second a study
antique pens laid out on the desk
persian carpets, a chinese painting
a couch in the corner
old books on the windowsill

the third empty & white
a prayer-rug, iron candlestick
three-legged incense burner
& painted on the east wall
in huge black letters, the Name

like Li Po drunk on wine
from a porcelain bowl I'd stare
at the humming moon –
certainly at some seasons
one should have such a house

IN IMITATION OF LU CH'IH TING'S 'VISITING A HERMIT'

A few crows shout 'squaw, squaw'
too lazy to leave, caught by cold weather
still they laugh raucous as Han Shan
nothing human in their voices.

The pines cold and empty-hearted
reach over decades to hug stones:
down the backwoods mountain
pours dawn fog slow as a clock.

From a plain black kettle he pours tea
in stoneware cups: green taste
and steam curl into the chilly room:
the solution to a riddle.

But by noon we're back in town,
collars cocked up, backs to the mountain,
rain drifts down, slants down,
whispers start up in the head.

IN IMITATION OF LU CH'IH TING'S 'RETIRING'

Only an empty room remains
but wood beams and white screens
mats and a blue rug
balance without a sigh of regret

By the window in a block of light
sitting on his knees at a low desk
smoke from a pot of burning aloes
stitches itself into the sun

Flask of ink, pens and knives
sheet of heavy polished paper
slowly covering it with gold-leaf:
the words are not yet written.

Note: Lu Ch'ih Ting ('Hermit Seven Cauldrons') was born to a well-to-do Chinese Muslim merchant family sometime near the close of the 18th or beginning of the 19th century. He is said to have studied Confucian, Taoist and Buddhist classics as well as the Quran, and there is evidence in his poetry that he followed the lead of the Muslim scholar Ma Fu-ch'u (whose disciple he may have been) in believing that Islam was the natural fulfilment of the earlier Traditions. His learning however was rather spotty and his verse would probably not pass muster with a true Chinese scholar-poet; nevertheless its very roughness (and one suspects – perhaps – some Persian influence) gives it a certain original freshness. He is thought to have rejected the life of a merchant and wandered over China and Chinese Turkestan. He even studied alchemy, and took his Taoist pen-name as the result of a dream.

A small undated woodblock edition of his poems – unique as far as I know – is to be found together with the works of Ma Fu-ch'u ('Muhammad Back-to-the-Beginning') in the New York Public Library as part of the Isaac Mason Collection.

HERMENEUTIC

Day appears
in a long white robe
and goldleaf eyes
trailing white scarf
clasped at the shell of its throat
with the pin of a mockingbird's
song like the notes
of a turkish flute

Ah! ah!
almost unbearable
loss of gravity!
the hands of Day
white as nacre
white as a mist
of milk and pearls
finger the strings
or single breast of an
inlaid lute

black crows with silver eyes
dance on the woodpile
chandeliers of pale rain
shiver on the outstretched fingers
of the music
of dawn
and trickle down
the goldleaf skin
over the nipples
of morning's fruit

Every
day
is
a
fine
day.

A SERIES OF PRINTS BY HARUNOBU

cutting wood with respect for virginity
respect for the chilliness of wood
he teaches the hieratic play
of his expressionless girls

browns and reds are not warm
irrational grey perspectives refuse
to welcome us. We are not well-born enough
for the poverty of these early Springs

pale combs fixed so tightly
in the complex ink of their hair
the nostalgic patterns of their robes unfold
on bare feet thin and powdery as moths

pressed close together they whisper
someone hides behind the blank screen
most children have no secrets worth hearing
why should I wish to listen?

CONTEMPLATION OF THE UNBEARDED

The true living God has neither beard nor coat.
– Rufus Mutianus
That Western barbarian: why does he have no beard?
–Mumonkan

Sun
pierces the thunderhead
– a star in the heart
of a grey sapphire.

O cloud, beard of the sky
a sharp East wind alone
might shave you away
and the sky would be perfect
as a young girl's breasts
as the breath
of an ice-waggon's horse
no sooner snorted on the morning air
than gone
perfect as the drunkenness
of those guests who come to share
white wine in white porcelain bowls
and gaze upon the flat
translucent breasts
of the snow.
The deserted lake
is ringed with no pinetrees –
even the blue deer have fled.
Patches of snow on rocks
which only a moment ago
ceased to tremble
mirror the patterns
of my embroidered robe.
To the sound of a flute
I move my hands

till the lid of the lake's eye
trembles
and the last cloud
like a sprinkling of iron filings
falls away from the sky's
azure face.
The eye opens
and perceives upon the cheek of heaven

not a single hair.

FOOD

I
The traveller to Askalon steps ashore –
round his head a fluttering nimbus
white wings of doves

in temple pools
fish are swimming
. . . this otherwise forbidden food
the flesh of the goddess . . .
fish in the well –
hazel trees drop their blossoms
on the surface

the cauldron bubbles
with the smell of boiling salmon:
no company ever walks away
unsatisfied

The old cook
in his green robe
goes to the pool to wash
a dried fish for his supper
but it comes to life
and wriggles through his fingers
into the shadows

'Cook the salmon' says the old man
'but don't taste it':
the young boy
burns his thumb in the soup
and sticks it in his mouth –
that was the salmon
of all wisdom and poetry

II
The traveller to Avalon steps ashore:
no apples on the trees
no grain in the fields

They wait for a dove
to wing down
with a bit of bread in its beak
and drop it on the Stone –
or is it a platter
large enough to serve a salmon?
They sit there unable to speak
gazing dumbly at each other
when suddenly the door bangs open

'Well, it was covered
with white samite – I couldn't see
if it was a cup or a platter
a cauldron or a chalice
or a child
It passed round the table
moving slowly through the air
and each of us found before him
his favourite food
and the smell of it
like all the spices of the world
spilled out:
I mean all things
the earth might bear
of game and fish and sauces
wine and bread –
the sweetness of the world'

III
They wait for a cloud
they look for a sign

'Can He send down a table
spread with food?
Yes we believe of course –
but we're hungry . . .

the wailing is for plants
the first lament is "they grow not"
barley and flocks, fishponds
honey and wine
The wailing
is for the meadows'

So he lifted his hands
and asked for a table to be sent down
'a feast for the first and last of us
and a sign'

Didn't the angels
bring his mother food
as she waited in the sanctuary
and when she was pregnant
water from a clear pool
and fresh dates?

'. . . a *Fish* from a *Fountain*
a huge one, a clean one
which a *Holy Virgin* has *caught* . . .'

IV
the True Man
cooks for sacrifice
he cooks to feed sages and gentlemen

The cauldron has rings of jade
great good fortune

Clouds rise up to heaven
the image of WAITING
(what is there to worry about?
what is there even to think about?)
Thus he eats and drinks
joyous and of good cheer

. . . gardens
underneath which rivers flow . . .
. . . the earth
and whatever is therein . . .

APPENDIX: THE RECIPES

SAUMON CELTIQUE

Plank a large salmon fillet & broil at a high heat for a short time, so it does not dry out. Garnish with potato purée. Prepare a sauce by frying a small amount of garlic in pure olive oil; add chopped fresh herbs (tarragon, basil, parsley, etc.) & freshly-ground black pepper; coarsely crushed hazel-nut meats; sliced black mushrooms; white wine. Serve the sauce separately.

SQUAB APHRODITE

Stuff the squabs with lumps of fresh unsalted butter and a bit of rosemary, & roast. Prepare a thin rich cake (without sugar) & cut in squares. Take some figs, ripe but not over-ripe, & steam them till piping hot. Prick the squares of cake (to soak up the butter) & turn a squab out onto each square. Surround the birds with the hot figs. If desired, a sauce can be made of fresh cream, egg yolks, pepper & fresh mint (not too much). Serve with a plate of eggs, roasted in their shells.

SALADE 'CHINOISERIE'

Dip some spinach leaves in boiling water, just enough so they can be pressed flat on a platter, which then put to chill. Cook, but do not over-cook, fresh asparagus, halves of endive and large chinese fungus. Chill them. Arrange the asparagus & endive on the spinach in a sunburst pattern. Place the fungus in the middle & surround it with crescents of avocado. Sprinkle over all a dressing made of sesame oil, soy sauce and green japanese mustard (not too much).

VENISON AU ROI ARTUR

Marinate the venison, any cut, in yoghurt for 24 hours at least. Put it in a roasting pan with some cinnamon, nutmeg, cloves, allspice, mace, ginger, peppercorns, some sugar, butter and peeled oranges. Cover with stock and cook till done. Meanwhile cook some dried fruit (apples, pears, apricots, plums, raisins, etc.) till soft and purée them in a blender with their own liquor. When the venison is done, lift it out, strain the stock & mix it with the fruit purée. Thicken it if desired & serve it as a sauce for dipping the meat into along with bread (large round loaves made with unbleached white flour would be best).

COURT MUSIC

Traffic noises die for a moment
a santur plays not far away –
two shapers warring against each other
to shape the night. Engines
made of how many explosions per second
how many little executions being held
inside prisons of cranking metal
to what purpose? The santur
speaks for a thousand years of clear light
glimmering in a symmetrical lamp
claiming order and beauty were twinned
in the first dawn. Sooner or later
physics will discover Time
a solution so heavy with grace
the slightest touch of music
causes crystals to form in it
and fall upwards like meteors
into the sun.

Shotoku, his Constitution:
Harmony gives rise to spontaneity
Heaven overspreads, earth upholds
When people behave with decorum
  government proceeds of itself
The complaints of the poor must not be like
  water thrown upon a stone
Each man his own sphere – no confusion
All men have hearts, each heart its own leaning –
  let us dread our own faults
Every 500 years a wise man – after 1000 years
  we hardly meet one sage
If the people do not attend to agriculture
  and tend the mulberry trees
  what will they eat
  what will they wear?

At the time of the civil war in Yemen
I was not aware it might turn out

to be the last chance at a real jihad.
'A perfume comes from the Yemen'
from the absolute desert
from the shaykhs with their hawks
from untraced walled cities in the hills.
I heard since of a Spanish count
probably a Carlist, probably mad
who fought for the Royalists there.
If he wished he could have dressed
in black with a tight lace collar
and carried a sword. Suhrawardi, Rosenkreutz –
they all spoke about the Yemen.
Photographs of Mocca – bare white towers
falling into powder, the beached bones of dhows.
If purity can only be defended by such death
perhaps the desert should be allowed to spread.
Is there no city, no walled city
to close its gates? Reaction,
black reaction on an arab horse
white robes fluttering like a flight of birds
spreading out its white fingers
over the desert.

Monteverdi's Vespers of 1610
were written to celebrate
(to *shape*, to call up, crystallise)
a new order of chivalry founded by
the Gonzagas of Mantua. The vulgar
called these noblemen sorcerers,
they patronised alchemists and their palaces
were built according to hermetic plans.
Sanctissimae Virgini Missa Senis Vocibus
ad Ecclesiarum Choros ac Vespere Pluribus Decantanda:
The dew of thy birth
is of the womb of the morning
a priest forever after the order
of Melchisedech. Nigra sum sed formosa
O ye daughters of Jerusalem
the king hath loved me
the winter is past. Suavis et decora
terrible as an army

turn thine eyes
hear my words
full of desire et perfusa gaudio
(audio)

Beautiful as the moon
He scattereth
snow like wool, hoarfrost like ashes
mittet cristallum like morsels, and who
can abide His frost? He sendeth His word
and melteth them; He blows with His spiritus
et fluent aquae

and must one be drunk
to believe all this?
that only those who have gone
to their graves can serve a prince?
All right, I accept – only at night
when even this city falls to something like sleep
in the music, the carpets, the icons
only in the rites we share
I am resigned, I wait for a command
which will never come
because the kings have died
because the noise will continue
when the santur has gone silent
I accept, I wait on the mad visions
of those who speak of a boy
who disappeared into a cave at Samarra . . .

but the duty of song
is to restore balance
and even one line can weigh against
the vulgar day
so let us see how much wine
we need this night
to loosen our lips
and speak of chivalry.

THE STUDENT OF HERBAL MEDICINE

collects these roots and grasses
in plastic jugs and machinemade jars
not – as he would – in ancient crocks
ripe with Time as the herbs themselves
dried with the liquid of the sun

One by one he must find
glasses purpled or worn by wind
bowls from hands which know how crudeness
gives a sense of grace, wooden shelves
which by themselves will radiate
a warm long winter medicinal smell

a great stone kitchen with tinned brass pots
ladles carved from blocks of wood
fire of wood or willow coal – for there are many
kinds of fire, and none of the modern ones will do –
marble slab, granite pestle, iron kettle
and a still of delicate green glass

for just as Nature provides an herb
for every disease, so all things are sewn
like pearls on threads of living light –
melissa, vervain, cow's tongue, brown roots
twisted like fists of thread, wild thyme,
sweet basil, cumin and caraway – each leaf or seed
dried and stored, holds so easily, so lightly
all the heaviness of earth

In dark red organs, in stars, in pots and knives
in concepts and desires, in days and hours,
in the shape of a skull, the lines of a poem
in a breath which goes in and out – the same odd odour
will rise as from this pinch of herb
I crush between my fingers.

(For W. C. & R. M.)

SONG

Would it disgust you too much
if I called myself Love's leper?

O if my self had fingers, toes, nose,
they would look to you as if

eaten away by the fragrance, the touch
the death and disappearance of your flowers –

and the Flower itself may some day
melt away completely as the Order of Lazarus –

but before then I shall appear ringing
my warning bell across your mediaeval landscape –

king, leper, knight, pauper – and you
may give alms or lock the door and hide.

PROMISE

Putting aside for a moment all mystery
I believe word-for-word our paradisal geography
hoping not for stale allegory
but for young girls with eyes like coffee
and curls to the waist like waterfalls
in which an alchemist has bathed;
for cataracts purling beside pitched tents
sewn with jewels, torn open to the breeze;
for young boys with fingers like flowers
pouring a wine which makes me a Hafez;
for music (I know which composers)
and finally (not in the Book but promised
by certain mystics I know) roses, lilies
more flowers than an English garden.
Faith has nothing to do with it. Haven't I seen
bits of the world around me go translucent
like a crystal glass full of clear wine?
Thine eyes repeat a celestial cosmogony:
I have a solid guarantee of prophecy.

GLASTONBURY

Notre Dame de

lavender.
A beauty so horrifying
it could crack these teashops
to the seams.
Ruins.
Two circles inscribed such that
the centre of the top one forms
a point at the top of the circumference
of the other, then scattered with jasmine:
the well's lid, locked, garden
closed on Thursdays, sound of water
rushing beneath the wood.
Serenity rises in a misty afternoon
above broken icons, a hanged abbot
dangling by Michael's tower
the nipple of the Tor

Greystone 'widow' fallen cracked
from the West Front, plaster Mother
with a branch of flowering thorn,
whitelegged virgin in pink slippers
shockrush of blond hair
to the waist, lavender eyes,
swinging on the iron gate

Roundheads dug up the bones
(still adhering to the skull
that wisp of yellow hair
crumbled in a monk's fingers)
scattered the bones

but there
near the High Altar (on some intersection
of lines of geometric potency)
some liberation threatens to take hold
presses in like a thunderstorm
threatens prostration, threatens dance.
Ya Maryam aliekis salaam
bismillah ar-Rahman ar-Rahim
IMPRIMATUR
† MERVYN
BISHOP OF CLIFTON
PARTIAL INDULGENCE FOR EACH RECITAL.

Notre Dame de
Palomydes the Saracen
dark child of the tower, he who brought
the lute to Tintagel
thinlegged young girl
pulsing alabaster skin with veins like
blue & subterranean streams,
transmuted hair, tress, curl, lock
each with its symbolism
each wrapped round the heart
a lash of flowering winter thorn . . .
lips of clouded cider
musical fingers of a plaster saint.
Her name must be Melissa, Vivien.
Malory must be wrong: it must be
to a child like this the Saracen sang
not to Iseult.

Or to Our Lady
the stone worn by rain, blackened by rain
a dove sleeping in her granite hand.

ENVOY

This is not home

Some people are surrounded by home
but this is no guarantee of virtue

other people carry home inside them
like an invisible portage through marshy backwoods
like turtles turned inside out

What is the deepest landscape of all?

1. the desert. Some occultists say
   these basins collect low energy forms
   but on the other hand they are free of imagery
   dry as tobacco

2. soft old farmland
   yards cluttered with instruments of the sun
   hollyhocks, sunflowers, pumpkins, corn
   insect flight describing the mathematics of daylight
   heat between the vines like a bath of light
   evening, fireflies, white robes

3. a square stone tower
   grey as prehistoric ivory
   halftwined in ivy in a greenlaid lawn
   a stream with children fishing
   stained glass
   pureheart melody of the lute

4. pines & silence
   patches of snow & bracken

5. Ah! jade peaks
leaning against operatic clouds
above the Hudson. At the corner of the eye
on a bend of the road, dwarfed,
two travellers, cloaks a-ripple,
broad-brim hats a-tilt,
contemplate the surge

6. but the walled garden
hoards its perfumes
against the crystallisation
of a moonwhite song.

Until music builds us a house
our home is where the music
touches us.